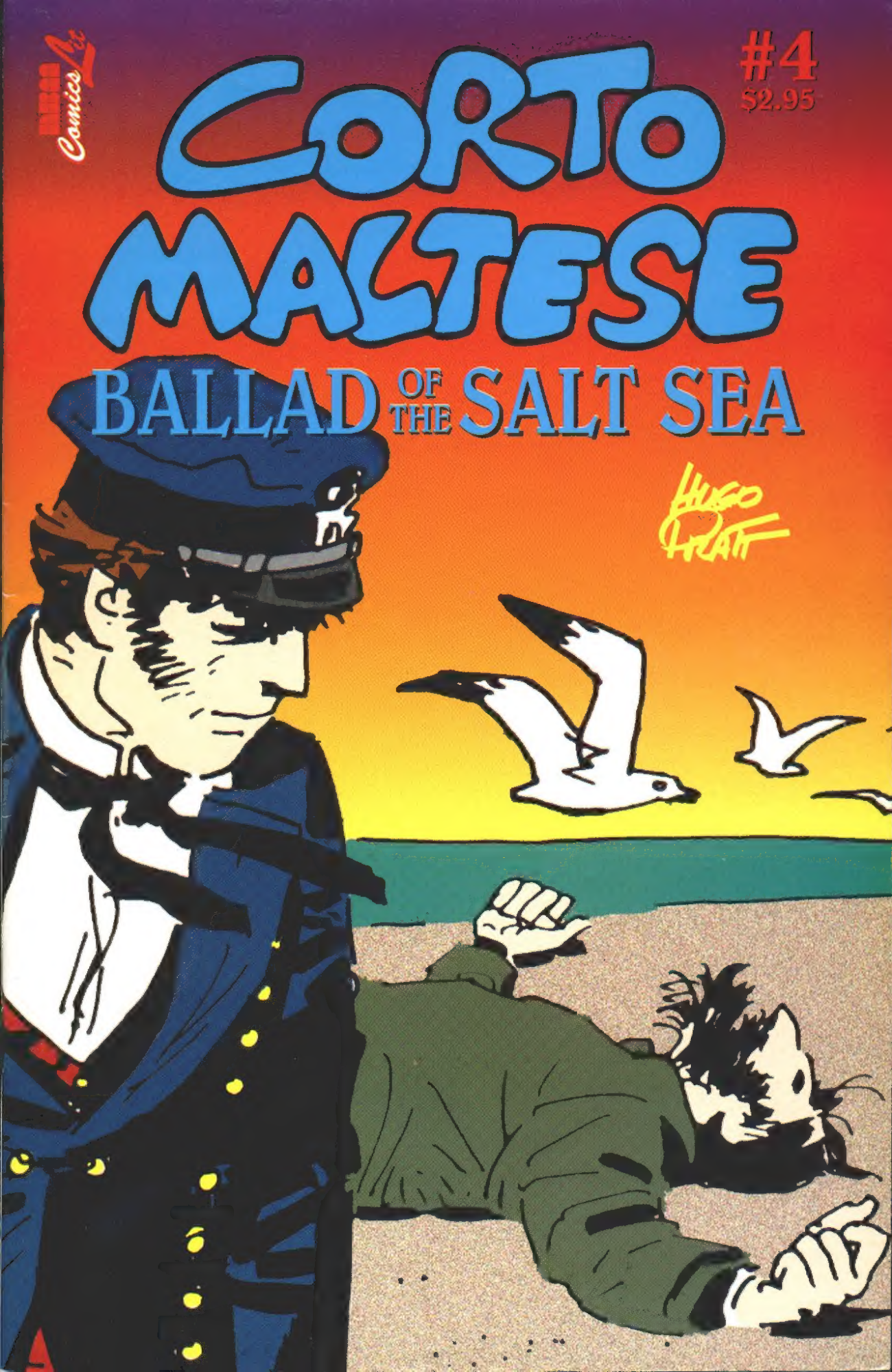
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#4
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CORTO MALTESE
BALLAD OF THE SALT SEA
HUGO PRATT

SUMMARY

While waiting to meet with the all-powerful among pirates, the 'monk', someone shoots at Corto while in a car, killing the driver and almost ending his and Pandora's life. Corto thinks it's Rasputin but he firmly denies it. Finally they meet the mysterious 'monk' who informs them the first world war has started and devises a plan to profit from it.

Write your comments to: NBM- Corto,
Terry Nantier, 185 Madison Ave., Ste. 1504,
New York, NY 10016
e-mail: Corto@nbmpub.com
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If you like this series, make sure to
turn your friends on to it as well!

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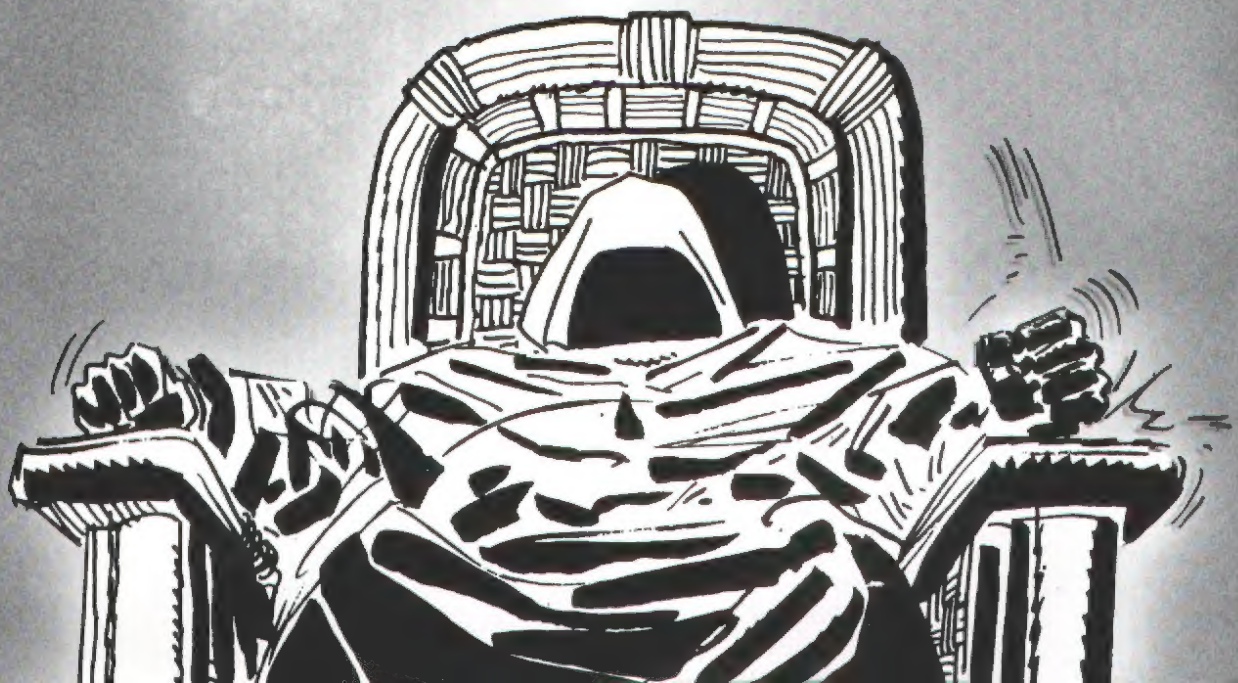


THAT'S RIGHT... OFF YOU GO, CAIN. I HOPE FOR YOUR SAKE I'M WRONG. OTHERWISE YOU'RE GOING TO PAY FOR THIS DEARLY.

SHORTLY...
SBRINDOLIN, WHATEVER ARE YOU DOING DRESSED UP LIKE THAT?
OH, IT'S FOR MISS PANDORA. IT'LL MAKE HER THINK SHE'S SOMEWHERE SOPHISTICATED.

OH, AWAY WITH YOU, YOU POOR FOOL!
LISTEN, I KNOW YOU. YOU'RE ANGRY BECAUSE YOU DIDN'T HAVE THE IDEA OF DRESSING UP AS A NUN.

ANYWAY, SHE'S DOING FINE. ARE YOU PLEASED?
POOR KID. SHE VERY NEARLY BOUGHT IT. NOW, GO AWAY, SBRINDOLIN, AND GET OUT OF YOUR FANCY DRESS.

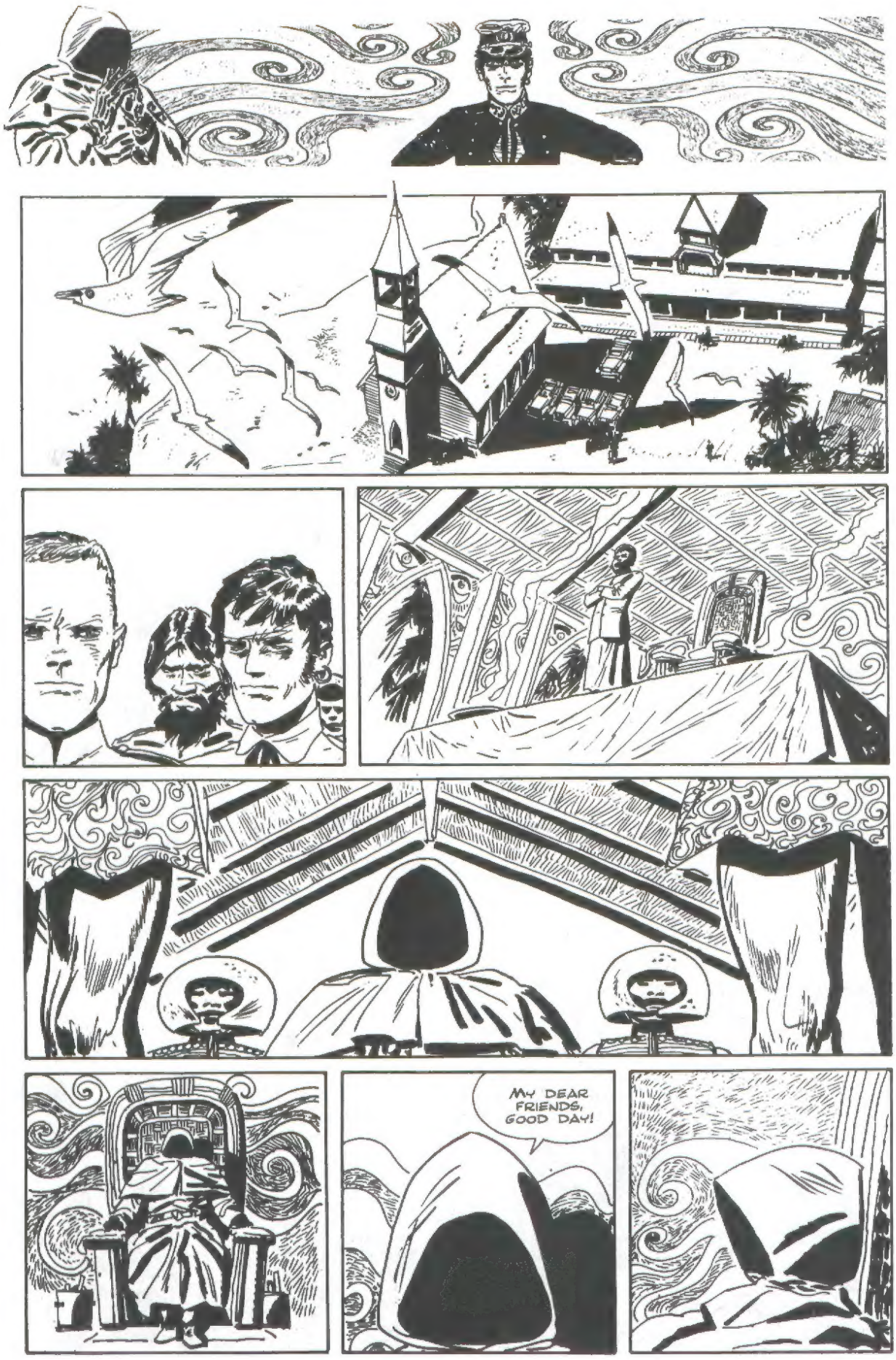
IS THAT YOU, SBRINDOLIN?
NO!

HOW ARE THINGS, MY ROMANTIC PETAL?
OH! MR CORTO MALTESE.

I'VE BEEN TOLD EVERYTHING. IF I'M HERE, IT'S THANKS TO YOU...

CAN I ASK YOU SOMETHING, MALTESE...
GO AHEAD, I'M ALL EARS.

PROMISE ME YOU WON'T HARM CAIN!


MY DEAR FRIENDS, GOOD DAY!

I HAVE SOME INTERESTING NEWS, DATED AUGUST 4TH, 1914...
ENGLAND HAS DECLARED WAR AGAINST GERMANY AND, AS A RESULT, WE TOO ARE AT WAR.
I HAVE ALREADY PREPARED TWO ISLANDS FOR VON SPEEKE TO REFUEL.
MONK! I CAPTURED THE DUTCH SHIP LOADED WITH COAL AND HANDED IT OVER TO CAPTAIN GALLAND. IN THE MALAITA SEA...
...I CAME ACROSS THESE TWO YOUNGSTERS, WHO ARE WORHT A FORTUNE IN STERLING! BUT CORTO MALTESES AND LIEUTENANT SLÜTTER ARE OPPOSED TO MY PLANS.
THE TWO YOUNGSTERS SHOULDN'T BE INVOLVED IN OUR BUSINESS...
I SUGGEST WE DROP THEM OFF ONTO ONE OF THE NEARBY FIJI ISLANDS.
THESE YOUNGSTERS SHOULDN'T BE INVOLVED... WHAT IS THIS?
HEEH HEE!
HEE! HAW! HAW!

ENOUGH!

NOBODY TELLS ME WHAT TO DO. NOBODY!

AS FOR YOU, MR SLUTTER, I THOUGHT YOU WERE LESS HEADSTRONG. YOUR BEHAVIOUR IS UNCALLED FOR. DON'T FORGET THAT, BY ORDER OF YOUR COMMANDANT, YOU ARE UNDER MY COMMAND.

AND YOU, CORTO MALTESE... YOU LOST A SCHOONER AND ALL AUTHORITY OVER YOUR MEN. WHY?

FEMALE TROUBLE, BOSS!

TAP! TAP! TAP!

ANYWAY, YOU ONLY KEEP YOUR AUTHORITY SO LONG AS YOU DON'T HAVE TO USE IT.

HOW CLEVER! A SUBTLE ANSWER, MALTESE, BUT WHAT IT ALL MEANS IS THAT YOU ARE INCAPABLE OF COMMANDING. YOU ARE TOO INDIVIDUALISTIC AND UNDISCIPLINED.

YOU ARE A SUBVERSIVE!

BUT LET'S LEAVE THAT TO ONE SIDE FOR THE MOMENT... SLUTTER! BE READY TO DEPART IN TWO DAYS' TIME. I'LL BE COMING WITH YOU. RASPUTIN WILL GO WITH MR TOKO AND CORTO MALTESE WILL STAY HERE ON THE ISLAND WITH CRANIO... THAT'S ALL!

NOW LEAVE ME. GOODBYE, GENTLEMEN. SEE YOU THIS EVENING!

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE YOUNG-STERS?
NOTHING AT ALL.

THEY REPRESENT A PILE OF MONEY FOR THE MONK.
SURE, BUT WHAT ABOUT RASPUTIN?

RASPUTIN IS NOTHING! HE CAN'T DO A THING. I'LL WATCH OUT FOR THEM. I'VE GROWN RATHER ATTACHED TO THEM.

YOU'VE TAKEN A WEIGHT OFF MY MIND, CORTO MALTESE. AND DON'T PAY ANY ATTENTION TO WHAT THE MONK SAID...

I KNOW THAT YOU'RE A GOOD COMMANDER. FAREWELL, CORTO!

WHO GIVES A DAMN! ALL I WANT TO DO IS GET WELL AWAY FROM HERE. IT'S A VERITABLE MADHOUSE!

THERE'S SOMEONE OUTSIDE!

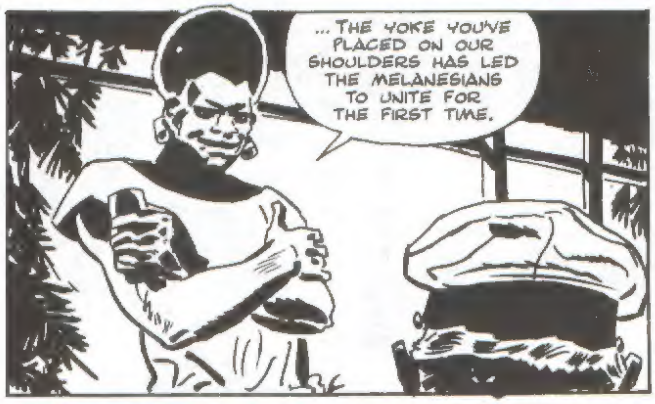
COME HERE!

OH, IT'S YOU, CRANIO. WHAT ARE YOU BEING SO MYSTERIOUS ABOUT?
I'VE BEEN WATCHING YOU FOR SOME TIME. HAVE YOU GOT ANYTHING TO DRINK?

YES, HELP YOURSELF. AND, AS YOU'RE HERE, TELL ME WHAT'S ON YOUR MIND.

LISTEN, CORTO, SINCE YOU WHITE MEN CAME HERE, THINGS HAVE BEEN GOING FROM BAD TO WORSE... BUT EVERYONE KNOWS THAT.

WHAT I CAN'T STAND IS SEEING MY PEOPLE BECOMING INVOLVED IN YOUR WARS. AND...

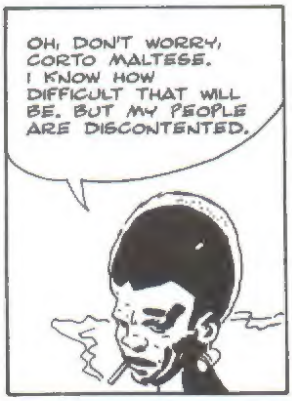

...THE YOKE YOU'VE PLACED ON OUR SHOULDERS HAS LED THE MELANESIANS TO UNITE FOR THE FIRST TIME.

WELL, WELL, WELL... I DIDN'T KNOW YOU WERE A NATIONALIST.

CALL IT NATIONALISM, IF YOU WANT. BUT WE HAVE TO START SOMEWHERE...

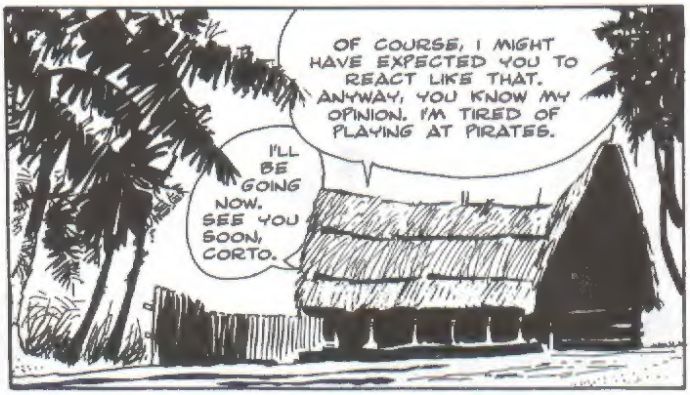
FOR A GREAT MELANESIAN FATHERLAND.

MELANESIAN? WHAT ABOUT THE POLYNESIANS?
THEM TOO...


OH, DON'T WORRY, CORTO MALTESE. I KNOW HOW DIFFICULT THAT WILL BE. BUT MY PEOPLE ARE DISCONTENTED.

AND SO RUMOURS ARE COMING FROM THE OTHER PEOPLES OF THE SEA. FROM THE FIJI ISLES, SAMOA, TONGA, EVERYONE IS TALKING ABOUT IT...
IT'S AS IF WE HAD TO SEW A LARGE COAT BACK TOGETHER, SHRED BY SHRED.

I FEEL LIKE I'M IN A SEWING CIRCLE.

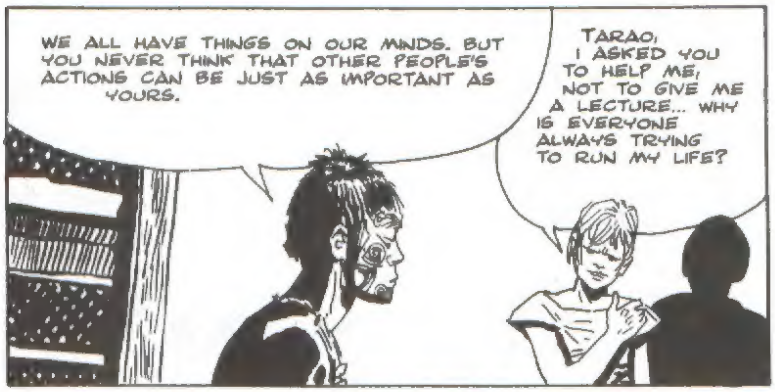

OF COURSE, I MIGHT HAVE EXPECTED YOU TO REACT LIKE THAT. ANYWAY, YOU KNOW MY OPINION. I'M TIRED OF PLAYING AT PIRATES.
I'LL BE GOING NOW. SEE YOU SOON, CORTO.

SEE YOU SOON, CRANIO.

MEANWHILE...
I HAVE TO FIND A WAY OUT OF HERE, WILL YOU HELP ME, TARAO?
YES, WE'LL LEAVE TOGETHER.

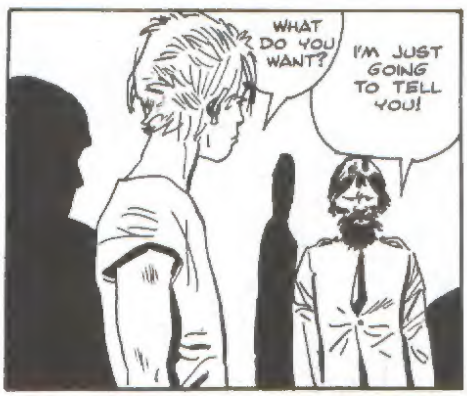
BUT WE'LL HAVE TO WAIT TILL THE RIGHT CHANCE COMES ALONG. YOU'RE TOO IMPATIENT!

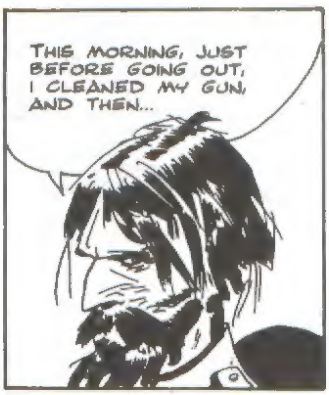
YOU'RE ALWAYS THE SAME. GOING STRAIGHT FOR WHAT YOU WANT.

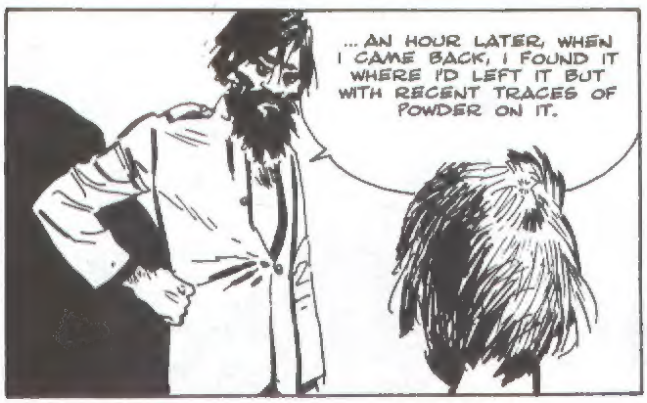

WE ALL HAVE THINGS ON OUR MINDS. BUT YOU NEVER THINK THAT OTHER PEOPLE'S ACTIONS CAN BE JUST AS IMPORTANT AS YOURS.
TARAO, I ASKED YOU TO HELP ME, NOT TO GIVE ME A LECTURE... WHY IS EVERYONE ALWAYS TRYING TO RUN MY LIFE?

I'M FED UP WITH IT ALL!

CAIN!


WHAT DO YOU WANT?
I'M JUST GOING TO TELL YOU!


THIS MORNING, JUST BEFORE GOING OUT, I CLEANED MY GUN, AND THEN...

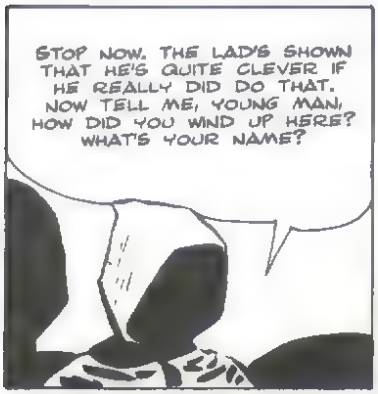

... AN HOUR LATER, WHEN I CAME BACK, I FOUND IT WHERE I'D LEFT IT BUT WITH RECENT TRACES OF POWDER ON IT.

AND SOMEONE TOLD ME YOU WENT INTO MY HUT WHILE I WAS OUT...

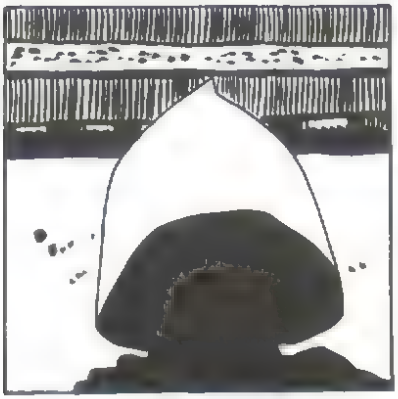
YOU SHOT AT...
YES, I DID! BUT I SWEAR TO YOU, I DIDN'T KNOW PANDORA WAS THERE.

I SWEAR I DIDN'T..
YOU FIRED HOPING TO PUT THE BLAME ON ME!

RASPUTIN! ENOUGH!


STOP NOW. THE LAD'S SHOWN THAT HE'S QUITE CLEVER IF HE REALLY DID DO THAT. NOW TELL ME, YOUNG MAN, HOW DID YOU WIND UP HERE? WHAT'S YOUR NAME?

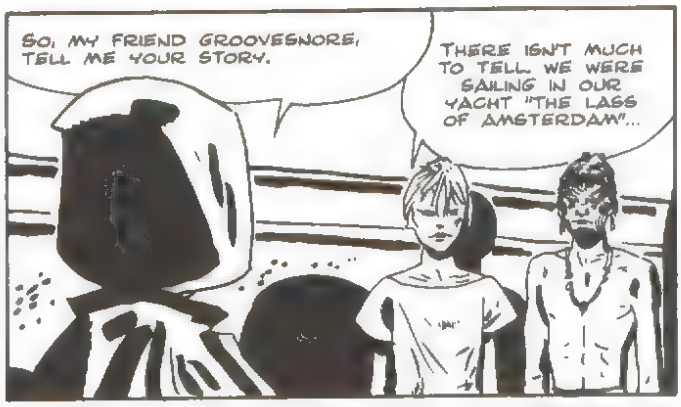
MY NAME'S CAIN GROOVESNORE, SIR. FROM THE SYDNEY GROOVESNORES.



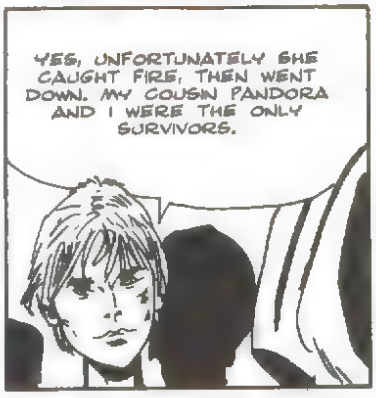
RASPUTIN, FROM NOW ON YOU WILL BE PERSONALLY RESPONSIBLE FOR EVERYTHING THAT HAPPENS TO MR GROOVESNORE.'
ME?

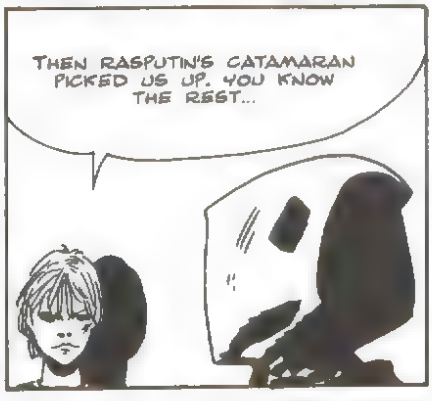
YOUR LIFE DEPENDS ON IT!

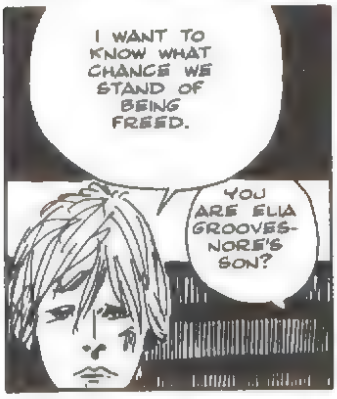
VERY WELL, I... SUPPOSE SO, MONK. DON'T GET ANGRY!
NOW GO AWAY AND LEAVE US ALONE!

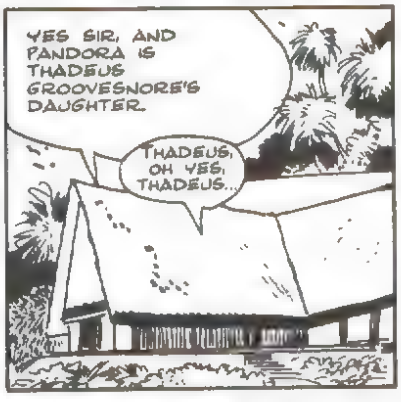

SO, MY FRIEND GROOVESNORE, TELL ME YOUR STORY.
THERE ISN'T MUCH TO TELL. WE WERE SAILING IN OUR YACHT "THE LASS OF AMSTERDAM"...

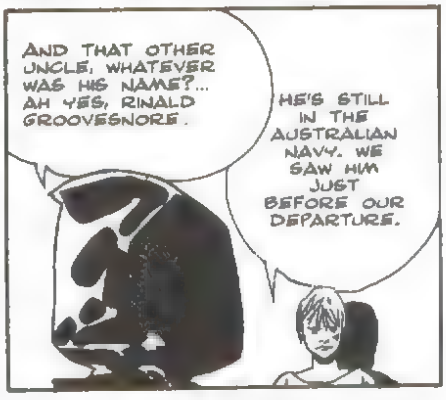
"THE LASS OF AMSTERDAM"...

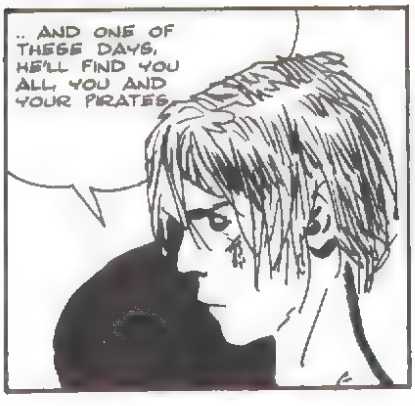

YES, UNFORTUNATELY SHE CAUGHT FIRE, THEN WENT DOWN. MY COUSIN PANDORA AND I WERE THE ONLY SURVIVORS.

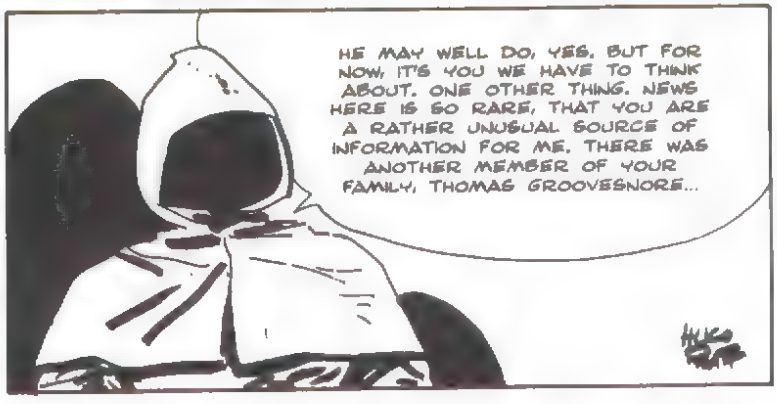

THEN RASPUTIN'S CATAMARAN PICKED US UP. YOU KNOW THE REST...

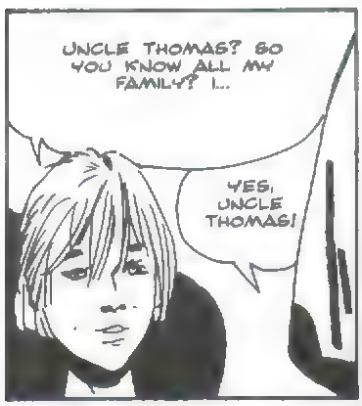

I WANT TO KNOW WHAT CHANCE WE STAND OF BEING FREED.
YOU ARE ELIA GROOVESNORE'S SON?

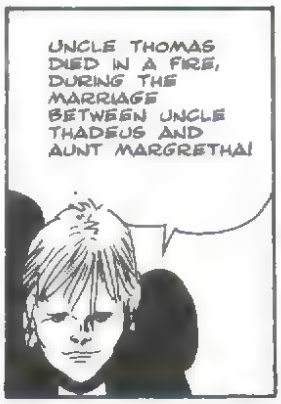

YES SIR, AND PANDORA IS THADEUS GROOVESNORE'S DAUGHTER.
THADEUS, OH YES, THADEUS...


AND THAT OTHER UNCLE, WHATEVER WAS HIS NAME?... AH YES, RINALD GROOVESNORE.
HE'S STILL IN THE AUSTRALIAN NAVY. WE SAW HIM JUST BEFORE OUR DEPARTURE.


.. AND ONE OF THESE DAYS, HE'LL FIND YOU ALL, YOU AND YOUR PIRATES...

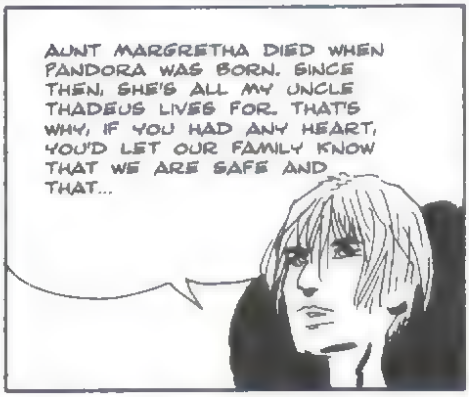

HE MAY WELL DO, YES. BUT FOR NOW, IT'S YOU WE HAVE TO THINK ABOUT. ONE OTHER THING. NEWS HERE IS SO RARE, THAT YOU ARE A RATHER UNUSUAL SOURCE OF INFORMATION FOR ME. THERE WAS ANOTHER MEMBER OF YOUR FAMILY, THOMAS GROOVESNORE...


UNCLE THOMAS? SO YOU KNOW ALL MY FAMILY? I...
YES, UNCLE THOMAS!

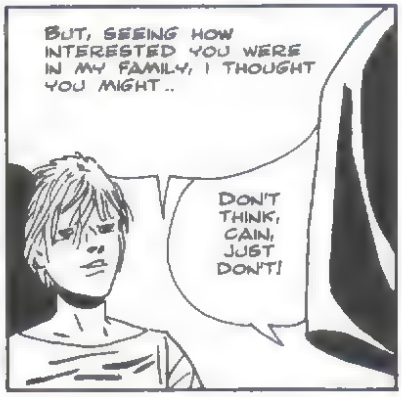

UNCLE THOMAS DIED IN A FIRE, DURING THE MARRIAGE BETWEEN UNCLE THADEUS AND AUNT MARGRETHA!

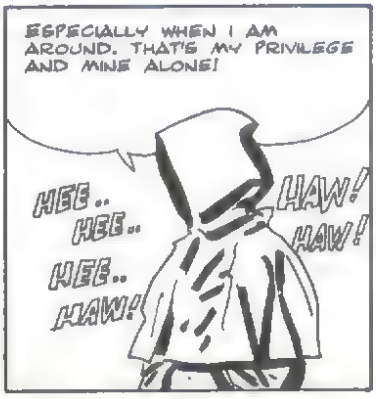
THAT'S ALL I KNOW ABOUT HIM. NO ONE LIKES TO TALK OF HIM. BUT TELL ME, DID YOU KNOW HIM?

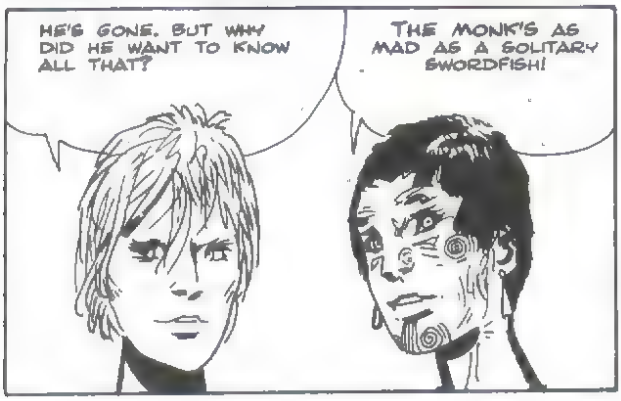
WHAT ABOUT AUNT MARGRETHA?


AUNT MARGRETHA DIED WHEN PANDORA WAS BORN. SINCE THEN, SHE'S ALL MY UNCLE THADEUS LIVES FOR. THAT'S WHY, IF YOU HAD ANY HEART, YOU'D LET OUR FAMILY KNOW THAT WE ARE SAFE AND THAT...

CAIN GROOVESNORE. THE HEART IS A MUSCLE WHICH PUMPS ROUND BLOOD, NOT SENTIMENTS! I SHALL DECIDE WHAT IS TO BE DONE.


BUT, SEEING HOW INTERESTED YOU WERE IN MY FAMILY, I THOUGHT YOU MIGHT..
DON'T THINK, CAIN, JUST DON'T!


ESPECIALLY WHEN I AM AROUND. THAT'S MY PRIVILEGE AND MINE ALONE!
HEE.. HEE.. HEE.. HAW!
HAW! HAW!


HE'S GONE. BUT WHY DID HE WANT TO KNOW ALL THAT?
THE MONK'S AS MAD AS A SOLITARY SWORDFISH!

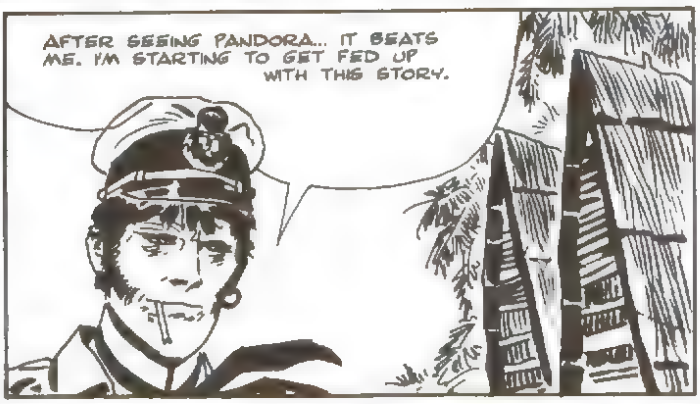
HEE.. HEE.. HEE.. HAW!
HAW!

HEY, SBRINDOLIN, ARE YOU THERE?
YES, BOSS. I'M ON GUARD DUTY.
TELL ME, HOW IS OUR YOUNG LADY?
MISS PANDORA'S FINE. SHE'S ASLEEP.
HEE.. HEE.. HEE.. HAW!
HAW!
HAW! NO! NO!
NO!
NO!
NO! NO! NO! NO!
NO! NO! NO!
NO! NO! NO!
NO! NO!
NO!
NO! NO! NO!
NO! NO! NO!
WHAT ON EARTH IS GOING ON?
WHO'S SCREAMING LIKE THAT?
IT'S THE MONK!
HAS HE GONE MAD?

MONK, WHAT'S THE MATTER? SPEAK TO ME...
CORTO MALTESE, MY FRIEND, I SAW THE DEVIL AND I WAS AFRAID!
DON'T LEAVE ME ON MY OWN, MY FRIENDS, DON'T LEAVE ME...

I'VE NEVER SEEN HIM LIKE THIS BEFORE. WE'D BETTER FOLLOW HIM. ARE YOU COMING?
FIRST OF ALL I WANT TO GO AND SEE PANDORA TO FIND OUT WHAT HAPPENED.

HE WENT MAD AFTER SEEING PANDORA? HOW STRANGE...


AFTER SEEING PANDORA... IT BEATS ME. I'M STARTING TO GET FED UP WITH THIS STORY.

BRINDOLIN, TELL ME. DID THE MONK SPEAK TO PANDORA?
NO, NOT AT ALL. MISS PANDORA'S ASLEEP. HE WENT IN, HE LOOKED AT HER, AND THEN HE WENT MAD. I JUST DON'T UNDERSTAND IT!

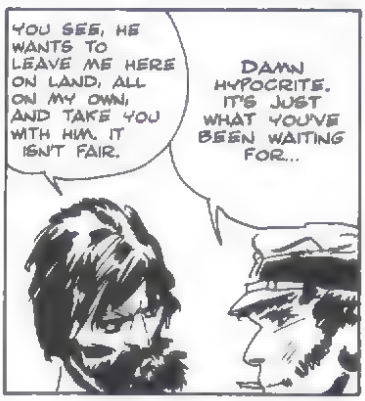
LOOK, CORTO. SHE'S SLEEPING LIKE A BABY.

ALL RIGHT, SBRINDOLIN. LOOK AFTER HER. I'LL BE BACK LATER.
OKAY, CORTO. LOOK, HERE COMES CRANIO.

HEY, CORTO MALTESE! THE MONK WANTS TO SEE YOU.

HE'S DECIDED TO LEAVE AT ONCE AND HE'S OUT OF HIS MIND, I SWEAR TO YOU.
OKAY, CRANIO, I'LL GO ,STRAIGHT AWAY!

CORTO MALTESE, DO SOMETHING! THE MONK'S GOING TO LEAVE ME ON THE ISLAND.


YOU SEE, HE WANTS TO LEAVE ME HERE ON LAND, ALL ON MY OWN, AND TAKE YOU WITH HIM. IT ISN'T FAIR.
DAMN HYPOCRITE. IT'S JUST WHAT YOU'VE BEEN WAITING FOR...

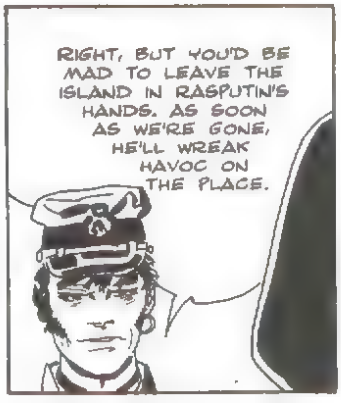
...SO AS TO HAVE TIME FOR YOUR LITTLE SCHEMES. BUT THIS TIME, YOU WON'T SUCCEED!

DON'T BE STUPID, RASPUTIN. NO PLAYACTING WITH ME, UNDERSTAND?

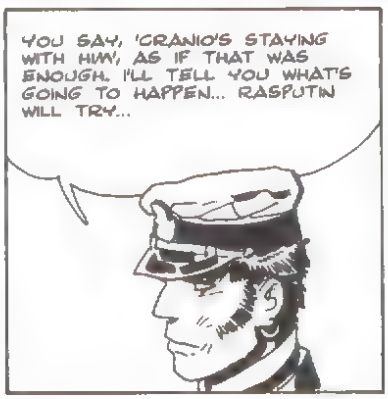
I'LL KILL HIM ONE OF THESE DAYS.
MIKE GRELL

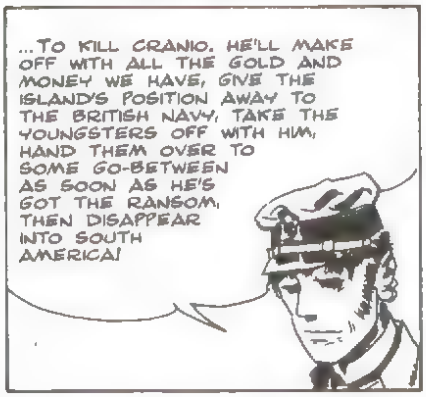
AH, THERE YOU ARE AT LAST. I SUPPOSE CRANIO'S TOLD YOU, I'VE BROUGHT FORWARD OUR DEPARTURE.
YES, AND I ALSO RAN INTO RASPUTIN, WHO TOLD ME THE REST.

TO BE HONEST, I'D RATHER YOU CAME WITH ME. YOU'RE MY FRIEND!

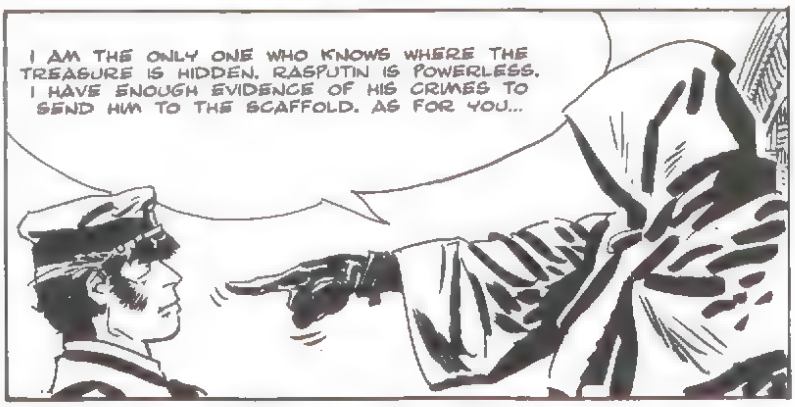

RIGHT, BUT YOU'D BE MAD TO LEAVE THE ISLAND IN RASPUTIN'S HANDS. AS SOON AS WE'RE GONE, HE'LL WREAK HAVOC ON THE PLACE.

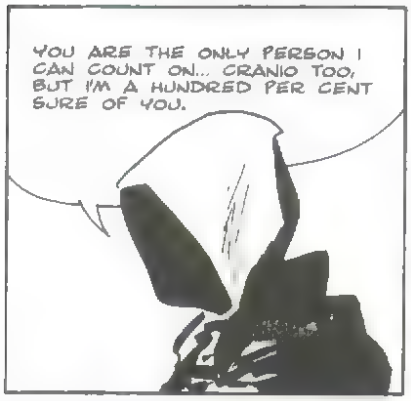
OH NO HE WON'T. CRANIO'S STAYING WITH HIM!

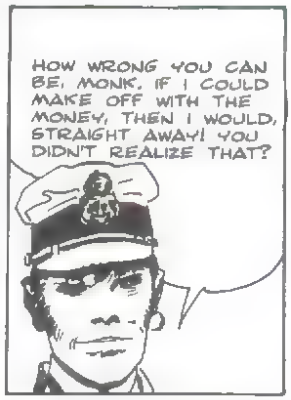

YOU SAY, 'CRANIO'S STAYING WITH HIM', AS IF THAT WAS ENOUGH. I'LL TELL YOU WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN... RASPUTIN WILL TRY...

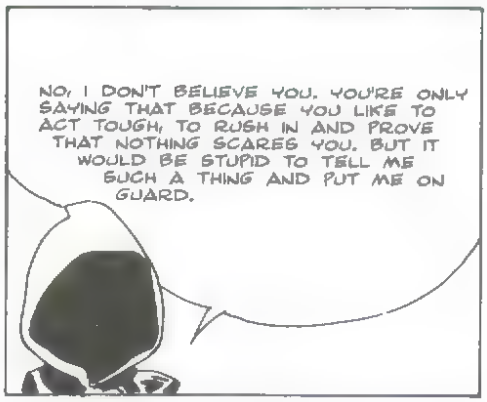

...TO KILL CRANIO. HE'LL MAKE OFF WITH ALL THE GOLD AND MONEY WE HAVE, GIVE THE ISLAND'S POSITION AWAY TO THE BRITISH NAVY, TAKE THE YOUNGSTERS OFF WITH HIM, HAND THEM OVER TO SOME GO-BETWEEN AS SOON AS HE'S GOT THE RANSOM, THEN DISAPPEAR INTO SOUTH AMERICA!

VERY WELL... WHILE IF IT WAS YOU WHO STAYED, THINGS WOULD BE DIFFERENT, WOULD THEY, CORTO MALTESE? ARE YOU TAKING ME FOR AN IDIOT?


I AM THE ONLY ONE WHO KNOWS WHERE THE TREASURE IS HIDDEN. RASPUTIN IS POWERLESS. I HAVE ENOUGH EVIDENCE OF HIS CRIMES TO SEND HIM TO THE SCAFFOLD. AS FOR YOU...


YOU ARE THE ONLY PERSON I CAN COUNT ON... CRANIO TOO, BUT I'M A HUNDRED PER CENT SURE OF YOU.


HOW WRONG YOU CAN BE, MONK. IF I COULD MAKE OFF WITH THE MONEY, THEN I WOULD, STRAIGHT AWAY! YOU DIDN'T REALIZE THAT?


NO, I DON'T BELIEVE YOU. YOU'RE ONLY SAYING THAT BECAUSE YOU LIKE TO ACT TOUGH, TO RUSH IN AND PROVE THAT NOTHING SCARES YOU. BUT IT WOULD BE STUPID TO TELL ME SUCH A THING AND PUT ME ON GUARD.

I DON'T UN DERSTAND YOU. WHAT EXACTLY DO YOU WANT?

I DON'T WANT TO LEAVE YOU TO MESS AROUND WITH PANDORA DURING MY ABSENCE. YOU'RE COMING WITH ME AND THAT'S AN END TO IT!

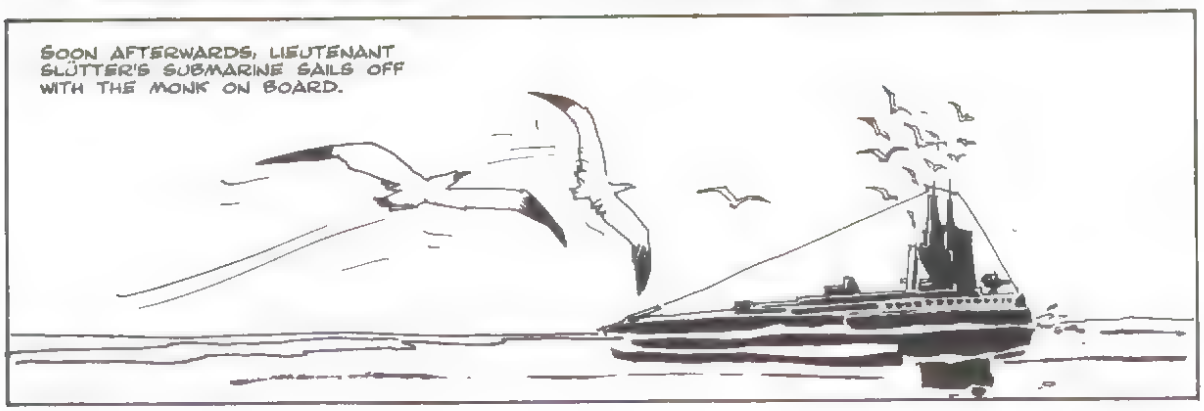
DON'T LAUGH!

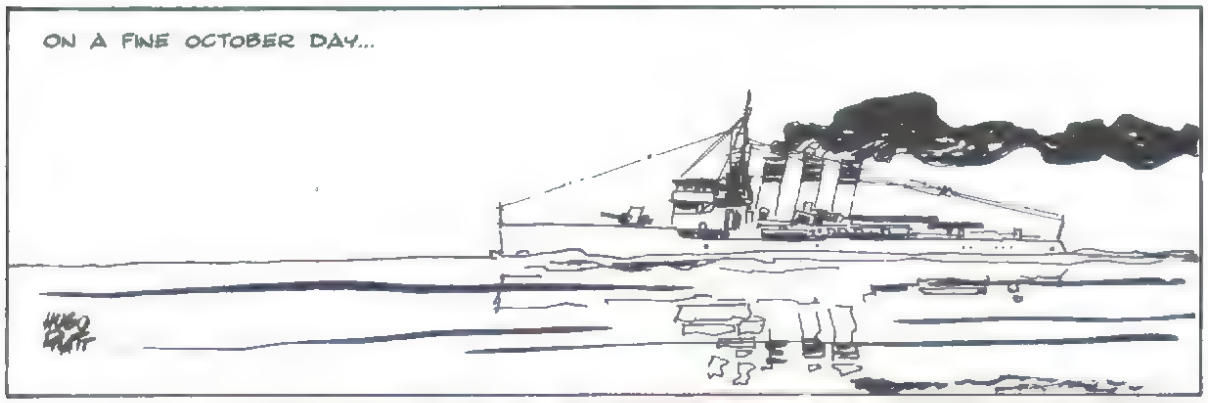
YOU MUSTN'T LAUGH! YOU MUSTN'T... YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND.

LEAVE ME, YOU LUNATIC!
YOU MUSTN'T LAUGH!!!

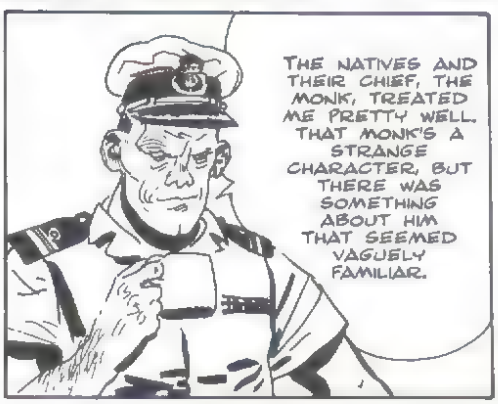
I'VE KILLED THE ONLY FRIEND I HAD. WHAT A CRUEL FATE IS MINE!

CRANIO, TAKE COMMAND. KEEP RASPUTIN UNDER CONSTANT SURVEILLANCE. THE CHILDREN ARE TO BE WELL-TREATED. I'LL STAY IN CONTACT WITH YOU. COME ALONG, LIEUTENANT SLÜTTER, IT IS TIME.

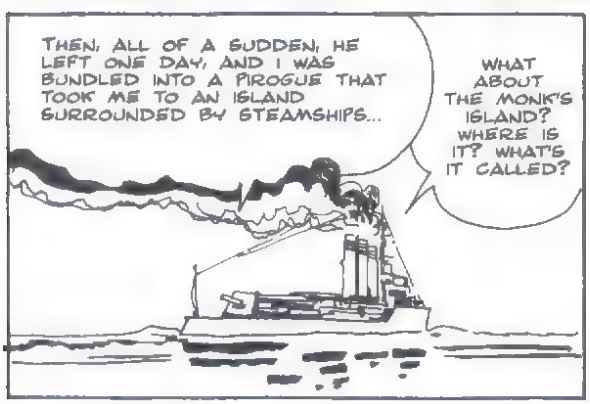

SOON AFTERWARDS, LIEUTENANT SLÜTTER'S SUBMARINE SAILS OFF WITH THE MONK ON BOARD.


ON A FINE OCTOBER DAY...

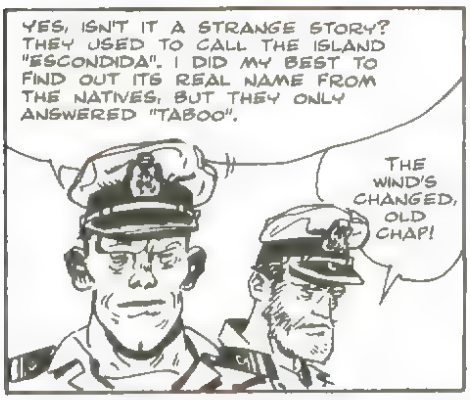
IT WAS IN THESE PARTS THAT I WAS SHIPWRECKED IN 1908.. YES, IN JUNE 1908. I GOT TO THE BEACH OF A LITTLE ISLAND MORE DEAD THAN ALIVE.

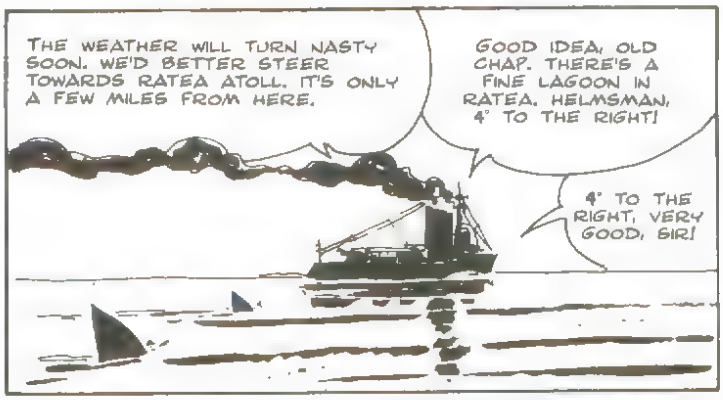

THE NATIVES AND THEIR CHIEF, THE MONK, TREATED ME PRETTY WELL. THAT MONK'S A STRANGE CHARACTER, BUT THERE WAS SOMETHING ABOUT HIM THAT SEEMED VAGUELY FAMILIAR.

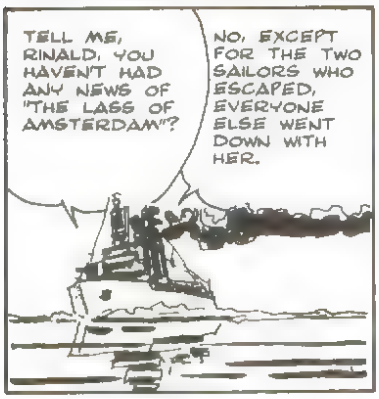
I NEVER SAW HIS FACE, BUT HE ALWAYS TREATED ME AS THOUGH WE WERE MEMBERS OF THE SAME CLUB!

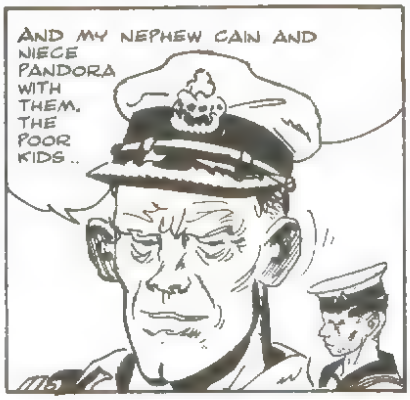

THEN, ALL OF A SUDDEN, HE LEFT ONE DAY, AND I WAS BUNDLED INTO A PIROGUE THAT TOOK ME TO AN ISLAND SURROUNDED BY STEAMSHIPS...
WHAT ABOUT THE MONK'S ISLAND? WHERE IS IT? WHAT'S IT CALLED?

I DON'T KNOW AND ITS POSITION ISN'T MARKED ON THE SEA CHARTS!
WHAT A STRANGE STORY, OLD CHAP

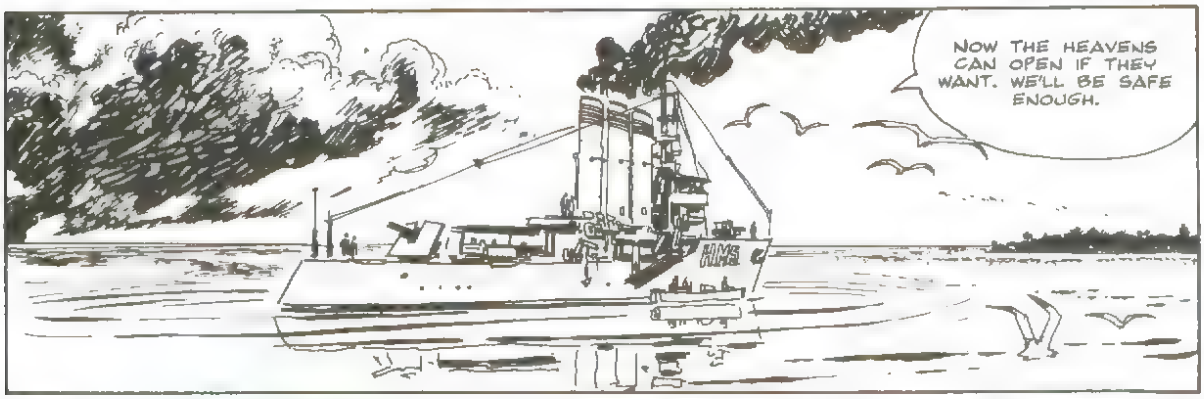

YES, ISN'T IT A STRANGE STORY? THEY USED TO CALL THE ISLAND "ESCONDIDA". I DID MY BEST TO FIND OUT ITS REAL NAME FROM THE NATIVES, BUT THEY ONLY ANSWERED "TABOO".
THE WIND'S CHANGED, OLD CHAP!


THE WEATHER WILL TURN NASTY SOON. WE'D BETTER STEER TOWARDS RATEA ATOLL. IT'S ONLY A FEW MILES FROM HERE.
GOOD IDEA, OLD CHAP. THERE'S A FINE LAGOON IN RATEA. HELMSMAN, 4° TO THE RIGHT!
4° TO THE RIGHT, VERY GOOD, SIR!


TELL ME, RINALD, YOU HAVEN'T HAD ANY NEWS OF "THE LASS OF AMSTERDAM"?
NO, EXCEPT FOR THE TWO SAILORS WHO ESCAPED, EVERYONE ELSE WENT DOWN WITH HER.


AND MY NEPHEW CAIN AND NIECE PANDORA WITH THEM. THE POOR KIDS..

A FEW HOURS LATER.
RATEA AHOY!


NOW THE HEAVENS CAN OPEN IF THEY WANT. WE'LL BE SAFE ENOUGH.
HMS

WHAT ARE YOU THINKING ABOUT, RINALD? YOU'VE BEEN LOOKING WORRIED FOR SOME TIME NOW. WHAT'S THE MATTER?

I JUST CAN'T UNDERSTAND HOW VON SPEEKE KEEPS HIS SHIP RUNNING. ALL THE GERMAN ISLANDS ARE WITHOUT COAL. SO WHERE DOES HE REFUEL?
THAT'S THE SORT OF PROBLEM I'M QUITE HAPPY TO LEAVE TO THE NAVY.

I'LL SEND SOMEONE TO FETCH US SOME CRABS AND NUTS. HOW ABOUT THAT, OLD CHAP?

THAT WILL BE JUST FINE. GOOD IDEA!
BOATSWAIN, SEND A COUPLE OF MEN OFF TO GET US SOME CRABS AND NUTS, WILL YOU?
VERY GOOD, SIR. BENSON.. CARTER. PREPARE TO GET THE CRABS!

WHY DO WE HAVE TO GET TOGGED UP LIKE THIS JUST TO FETCH SOME CRABS?
SHUT UP, CARSON!
BAH, DON'T MAKE A FUSS! I'M JUST PLEASED TO GO ASHORE.

RIGHT... ATTENTION! SPLIT RANKS FOR OPERATION CRABS!

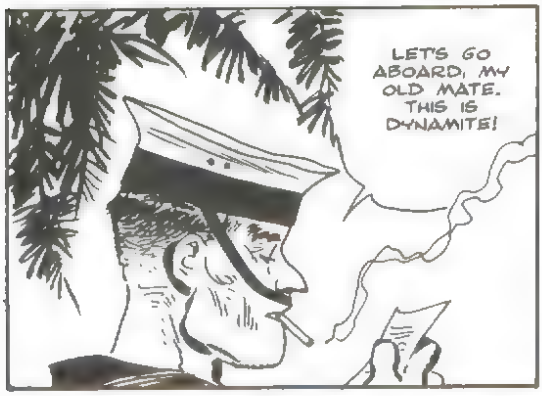
WHY CAN'T THEY GO AND GET THEIR OWN CRABS? I CAN'T STAND THEM. WHAT ABOUT YOU?
THERE, NOW THEY CAN'T SEE US FROM THE SHIP. LET'S HAVE A SMOKE.

HEY, LOOK! WHAT'S THAT?

A BOTTLE?

A BOTTLE ON A DESERT ISLAND IN THE PACIFIC, WITH..

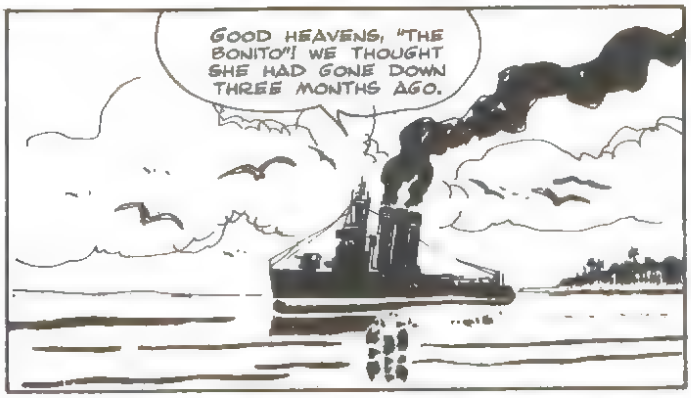
SPLASH!
...A MESSAGE INSIDE!


LET'S GO ABOARD, MY OLD MATE. THIS IS DYNAMITE!

BOATSWAIN! WE'VE FOUND A MESSAGE... IT'S VERY IMPORTANT!

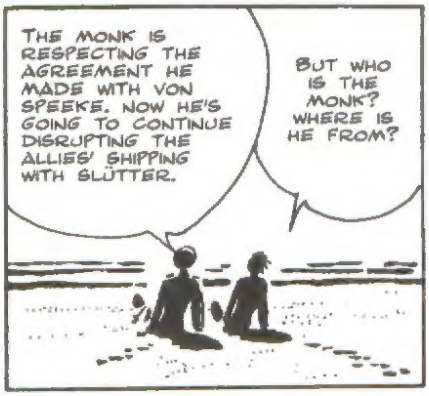
SHORTLY...
LISTEN TO THIS: "I AM A SAILOR ON THE BONITO. WE'RE BEING HELD BY...

...A GERMAN SUBMARINE AND AN ARMED CARGO SHIP. THEY ARE FORCING US TO FOLLOW THEM, JULY, 1914."

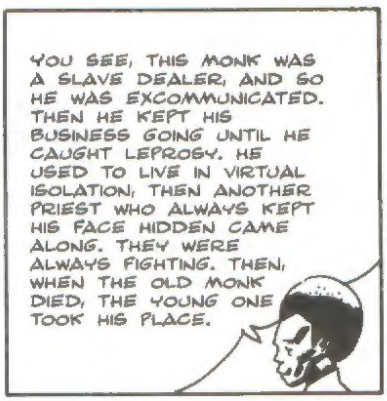

GOOD HEAVENS, "THE BONITO"! WE THOUGHT SHE HAD GONE DOWN THREE MONTHS AGO.

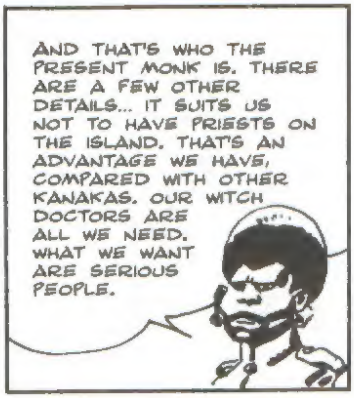
THIS TIME THE NAVY'S GOING TO BLOW A GASKET. SUBMARINES IN THE PACIFIC? IT'S UNHEARD OF!
WHERE DO THEY GET THEIR FUEL?

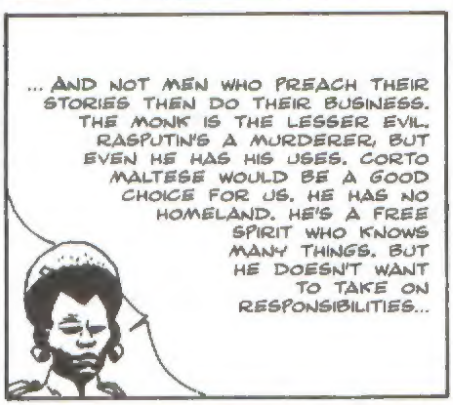
HELLO, CRANIO. WHAT A LOVELY DAY!
G'DAY, PANDORA.
WHERE'S CORTO MALTESE?
EVERY-THING'S FINE, PANDORA.
HE'S BEEN WOUNDED AND I'VE HIDDEN HIM NEARBY. RASPUTIN MUSTN'T KNOW ABOUT IT.


THE MONK IS RESPECTING THE AGREEMENT HE MADE WITH VON SPEEKE. NOW HE'S GOING TO CONTINUE DISRUPTING THE ALLIES' SHIPPING WITH SLÜTTER.
BUT WHO IS THE MONK? WHERE IS HE FROM?

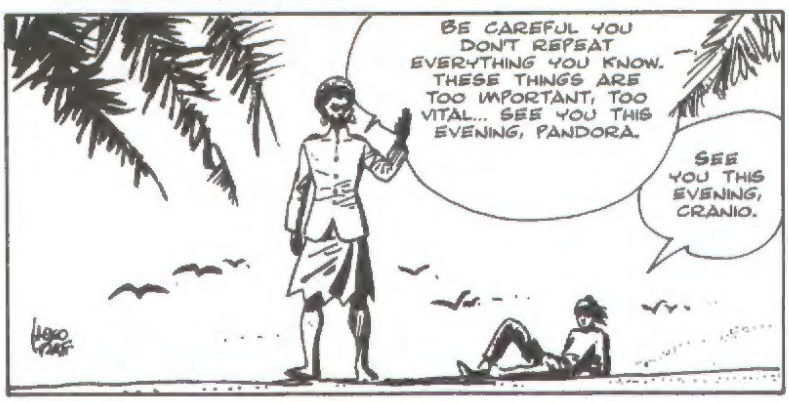
THE MONK IS A DEFROCKED PRIEST... THAT IS TO SAY... NO, HE'S A FORMER PROTESTANT PASTOR WHO TOOK THE PLACE OF AN EXCOMMUNICATED MONK... OR SOMETHING LIKE THAT!


YOU SEE, THIS MONK WAS A SLAVE DEALER, AND SO HE WAS EXCOMMUNICATED. THEN HE KEPT HIS BUSINESS GOING UNTIL HE CAUGHT LEPROSY. HE USED TO LIVE IN VIRTUAL ISOLATION, THEN ANOTHER PRIEST WHO ALWAYS KEPT HIS FACE HIDDEN CAME ALONG. THEY WERE ALWAYS FIGHTING. THEN, WHEN THE OLD MONK DIED, THE YOUNG ONE TOOK HIS PLACE.


AND THAT'S WHO THE PRESENT MONK IS. THERE ARE A FEW OTHER DETAILS... IT SUITS US NOT TO HAVE PRIESTS ON THE ISLAND. THAT'S AN ADVANTAGE WE HAVE, COMPARED WITH OTHER KANAKAS. OUR WITCH DOCTORS ARE ALL WE NEED. WHAT WE WANT ARE SERIOUS PEOPLE.


... AND NOT MEN WHO PREACH THEIR STORIES THEN DO THEIR BUSINESS. THE MONK IS THE LESSER EVIL. RASPUTIN'S A MURDERER, BUT EVEN HE HAS HIS USES. CORTO MALTESE WOULD BE A GOOD CHOICE FOR US. HE HAS NO HOMELAND. HE'S A FREE SPIRIT WHO KNOWS MANY THINGS. BUT HE DOESN'T WANT TO TAKE ON RESPONSIBILITIES...

BUT CRANIO, HOW DO YOU KNOW ALL THAT?
MY DEAR PANDORA, I'VE BEEN TO SCHOOL AS WELL. WITH WHITE MEN, TOO! PLUS, I HAVE GOOD BRAINS. WHEN I WAS YOUNG, IN VITI-LEVU, I WORKED FOR A LAWYER. THAT TAUGHT ME A LOT TOO.


BE CAREFUL YOU DON'T REPEAT EVERYTHING YOU KNOW. THESE THINGS ARE TOO IMPORTANT, TOO VITAL... SEE YOU THIS EVENING, PANDORA.
SEE YOU THIS EVENING, CRANIO.

To be continued

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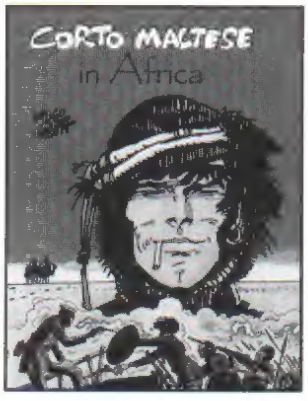

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MONK, WHAT'S THE MATTER? SPEAK TO ME...

CORTO MALTESE, MY FRIEND, I SAW THE DEVIL AND I WAS AFRAID!

DON'T LEAVE ME ON MY OWN, MY FRIENDS, DON'T LEAVE ME...